

Welcome back to another series of On the Air, a podcast brought to you by Stonewater. Every month, we will be bringing you a brand-new episode that will explore the role collaboration has in tackling challenges and opportunities to ensure everyone has the opportunity to have a place that they can call home. Host Anisha Patel will be joined by a guest co-host as well as special guests to explore the latest insights and stories from across the social housing sector.

Anisha: Hello, and welcome back to another episode of On the Air. I'm Anisha and today I'm joined by my guest co-host and Domestic Abuse Transformation Manager at Stonewater, Sandra Chidavaenzi. So, I'm going to give her the floor to introduce herself and talk a little bit about her role in a moment. But, before we dive in, I'm just going to give a brief overview of what today's episode is going to explore. So, for those that don't know, we're currently in the middle of this year's 16 Days of Action, which aims to tackle and find ways to put an end to gender-based violence.

Each year, the campaign not only starts on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and White Ribbon Day, but it also ends on Human Rights Day, which, I think it's really telling and clear in terms of what the campaign is trying to achieve. So, to talk more about some of the barriers and issues intertwined with tackling domestic abuse, we've brought together some incredible guests to share their expertise and hopefully provide some practical tips, which we'll each be able to action after listening to this discussion.

Now, Sandra, would you mind introducing yourself and just briefly talking about what we're doing this year at Stonewater, and with our partners, to pledge our support to this year's 16 Days of Action.

Sandra: Thank you, Anisha. So, a little bit about me: I am the Domestic Abuse Transformation Manager for Stonewater, focusing on Brighton and Hove. My role looks at researching and analysing housing models with the intention of increasing our capacity around domestic abuse safer accommodation. We know that, for some, home can be a place filled with violence and abuse, which is why we're passionate about being part of the help around tackling domestic abuse. So, last year we launched a project in support of the 16 Days, and this project was called a Safe Place.

This has been integral throughout the year, in terms of the work that we're doing externally to tackle domestic abuse. It's been on our radar, there's a lot of work that still can be done to ensure an intersectional approach is considered when talking about domestic abuse. There are some communities that continue to experience additional barriers and challenges when trying to seek support around domestic abuse.

Anisha: I completely agree and actually intersectionality is something that we touched on in a podcast earlier this year, actually, but I think that this campaign really gives us an opportunity to get into the nitty gritty, which I know that our wonderful guests will be sure to support with today.

Sandra: I'm sure they'll be glad to speak to us about some of the issues around intersectionality. So let me introduce our guests. So, joining us today, we have our colleague Nicola from Stonewater and alongside her, doctor Hannana Siddiqui from Southall Black Sisters and, Astrid Palmer from Victim Support. Thank you all for joining us today, and I wonder if you could start by talking about why having an intersectional approach is important to you, and briefly talk about the work that you do individually and professionally in your organisation.

Nicola: So, my name is Nicola Lambe. Thank you for introducing us, Sandra. I'm fairly new to Stonewater, and I'm the first Head of Domestic Abuse Support Services at Stonewater. So, I bring with me 20 years' experience of working within the women's and domestic abuse sector, and have expertise and specialisms in supporting and leading services for survivors who are marginalised and minoritised. So, this experience fits in really well with Stonewater's domestic abuse approach, and that is exactly the approach and service that we offer. So, this role of Head of Domestic Abuse was created to bring together Stonewater's growing domestic abuse service under a dedicated management team, and brings the opportunity to really strengthen our offer to those that are experiencing domestic abuse across the whole organisation.

And we also work across the wider housing and domestic abuse sectors to share best practice, inform future policies and processes, and look to improve the responses and services for domestic abuse survivors.

Anisha: That's really helpful. Thank you, Nicola, for that. Astrid, do you want to talk a bit about what you do?

Astrid: Yes, of course, thank you. As Sandra said, my name is Astrid. My pronouns are she/her/hers and I'm the LGBTQ+ specialist at the domestic abuse support service in Victim Support. So my role is a bit, sort of, split: so, I do... I support a caseload of high-risk survivors of domestic abuse who all openly identify as LGBTQ+, and I also do, kind of, training and service development and delivery, community engagement – that sort of thing. And my, kind of, my other hat, which will soon to be at Switchboard, they've just been awarded an all risk level contract to support LGBTQ+ victims of domestic violence.

Switchboard is really excited about this project. It's going to be myself and my amazing colleague Raph, and we're also going to be supported by Jacob, who is the CEO and John who is the Operations Manager. As I said, it's an all-risk service, so, kind of, high, medium and standard risk, and it's, kind of, a 'by and for' project. So, the LGBTQ+ Switchboard has been around since the 70s doing all kinds of amazing work supporting the LGBTQ+ community. So, we're really excited to be delivering that to the community of Brighton and Hove.

Anisha: My gosh, it's safe to say you are clearly very busy in your day-to-day...

Astrid: I'm a professional plate-spinner, that's what I like to call myself. I like to spin a lot of plates and wear a lot of hats.

Anisha: My God, there's definitely a lot we can learn from you!

Astrid: Thank you!

Anisha: Hannana, do you want to carry on? Do you want to tell us a bit about what you do?

Hannana: Yeah, I've been involved in Southall Black Sisters for about 35-36 years. I used to be the Head of Policy Research and Fundraising, but I'm now a Project Advisor around policy and research. The organisation, you know, was established in 1979. It specialises in the needs of black and minority women and girls who are facing gender-

based violence, so it deals with a whole range of issues, from domestic abuse to sexual violence to harmful practices like forced marriage and honour-based violence, and related problems around immigration and 'no recourse to public funds'. So, a lot of our work is local, but, also, it is national in raising issues and the profile on the needs of black and minority women, and campaigning for legal and social reform as well as changing attitudes and practices within the community.

Anisha: Wow. I just have to say that on this episode we have an incredible portfolio of guests. Again, thank you so much for all being here today. I really wanted to get each of your thoughts on the theme for this year's 16 Days of Action, which, for our listeners, it's 'accountability'. So Astrid, maybe you'd like to start.

Astrid: Ooh, yeah. I think: amazing. So, accountability is probably one of my favourite words, which sounds really, like, stupid to say, but... I think that's really important. I think us as services and as practitioners need to be held accountable. I think obviously at a, kind of, legal, strategic policy level, but also in terms of our survivors and, kind of, to ourselves a little bit and kind of the work we do – our ethics and our values. And, I think, touching on what Sandra mentioned earlier about intersectionality, I think that's really important in terms of owning up to when we get it wrong.

And I think that whilst we, I think, are all dedicated to violence against women and girls and, kind of, the domestic abuse sector and, kind of, doing really good work. Unfortunately, no one is perfect, and I think that, yeah, we do... services do miss the mark sometimes, and it doesn't always happen the way we want, but I suppose that's a great opportunity for learning and development.

But, yeah, I think accountability is a great theme, and I think very fitting in, kind of, the current political climate of this year with some of the things that have happened in terms of, I guess, a lot of the issues that have happened around, say, the Met police and crime and the Domestic Abuse bill going through Parliament, which is fantastic, but I suppose there's an element of accountability there because it's now written into law. But I do think we still also have a long way to go.

Anisha: Definitely. Nicola, do you have anything you'd like to add to that?

Nicola: Yes, I absolutely agree with what Astrid said, and I also think, kind of, from another perspective of accountability outside of service and public/private sector, also: just accountability for everybody. I think it's important everybody takes about accountability of tackling violence against women and girls. You know, it is the biggest violent crime issue in the world, but somehow, it's still a taboo subject. And I think, you know, it's come to a point now – there's lots of awareness that has been raised, and it's fantastic, but I just think it's not enough to say, 'I didn't know about that' or 'I don't think that happens near me'.

There's more and more awareness of the issues being raised every day, but the issue is not decreasing, in fact it's getting worse. So, you know, let's build upon the amazing work that's been happening around raising awareness – as Astrid said, the Domestic Abuse bill, the improvements that are being made locally and nationally to tackle domestic abuse. But we're still hearing everyday people denying knowledge of the issue or not wanting to hear about it, because it's not nice. And, of course, it's not nice, it's a very, very difficult topic, but it's just so important for people to understand what's going on. Particularly those that are working on the front line and being able to identify and respond to anything that they see.

Anisha: Definitely. I mean, like, I think in 2021, ignorance is no longer an excuse.

Nicola: Absolutely.

Anisha: Hannana, is there anything that you'd like to add from that, especially from your perspective at Southall Black Sisters?

Hannana: I mean, most of our work is about accountability. It's about holding the state accountable to black minority women's human rights. And I think one of the things that has really been concerning me is not just accountability, but also implementation. There are lots of good policies out there. You've got the Domestic Abuse Act, you've got Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy, and there's lots of good words said about, you know, changing responses, state responses to domestic abuse to all communities. But that is not often backed by real resources that will make that difference.

All the implementation and the enforcement of the law or good practice around making sure that there's guidance – there's a lot of guidance out there that the law is out there, but that's not being implemented effectively. So I think, you know, we can talk about changing the law, it's important, you know, to reform the law, but if it's never implemented properly in the first place, then how do you hold a state accountable? And how do you create that real effective, long-term change?

Anisha: Definitely. I think that long-term change is what all of you are trying to fight for and what you're working towards. And one thing that I wanted to ask about, because in a previous podcast episode in our last series, we briefly explored the discrimination that some domestic abuse survivors face, and we touched upon intersectionality, as Sandra also did in her intro. And I know that none of you featured on that episode, but it's an issue that I'm sure you're familiar with. So, for any new listeners, I was hoping that you could talk us through what we mean by intersectionality and how some individuals and groups who are survivors of domestic abuse are negatively impacted by this form of discrimination. Hannana, if we could start with you.

Hannana: Well, I understand intersectionality as meaning multiple or overlapping discrimination. And in our work, it's been around race, gender and class. So, to give you an example, is that we're dealing with, first of all, around ethnic minorities – we're talking about black and minority women, which is the discrimination that they face around their race. Secondly, around gender, because, you know, as women they've experienced gender-based discrimination. And, thirdly, because of class, because a lot of the women we deal with are, you know, in poverty or have no recourse to public funds, which means they're facing destitution. And these are migrant women who have no legal rights in this country to benefits.

And those combined together, where they intersect, actually increases the severity or multiplies the kind of discrimination women face. So, for example, migrant women, you know, face a triple-form or multiple discrimination. So, it could be because of their gender and because of their migration status, and because of the issues around poverty and class. So, a lot of our work is, you know, intersectionality is used a lot, but in reality, in practice, you know, the black minority women's movement have lived it. You know, Southall Black Sisters is 40 years old now, and it really, kind of, lived it through its

activism, through the services it provides because it has to deal with a lot of different forms of discrimination simultaneously.

And the severity of that discrimination is greater than compared to a single, you know, discrimination on the basis of a single characteristic. So, I think people need to understand intersectionality a lot more. I don't think policymakers make, you know, understand it really, and have never really got to grips with it, because if you just look at their policies around domestic violence and migrant women, they don't actually understand – bring in race discrimination because a lot of women with insecure immigration status are facing racism, are facing institutionalised racism, but they're also facing gender discrimination within their own communities because of the oppression that they experience as women, and the abuse that they experience within their own communities.

Astrid: You raise some really, really brilliant points there and... I mean, obviously, I come at this as a trans woman, and I think, for me, intersectionality – again, echoing what Hannana said about the, kind of... for me it's that cross-reference point of, kind of, all the bits of discrimination that people can face and, kind of, all the crossroads of identities, basically.

I obviously have to acknowledge in myself that I am a white person, so I do not experience, you know, racism, and I... a lot of the clients I have supported are predominantly, kind of, of... a white. But a lot of the... the issues I find and the discriminations I find, and I guess the intersectionality comes in for me and for my clients, where it's, kind of, they are LGBTQ+ – sometimes having multiple different identities.

So trans women, sometimes trans women of colour, sometimes trans women who are disabled, for example, and it might be a bit of a controversial take but men and male survivors. And this is not to call anybody out on this podcast or more generally in the world, but I realise that we've talked a lot about women and violence against women and girls, which I think is a really important thing to talk about, and I think it does need to be acknowledged that women and girls and those who identify as women and girls are the majority affected parties. We're also not talking about the male survivors, and we're also not talking about the gay survivors, and we're especially not talking about the trans

survivors who, like trans women, for example, are not included in femicide statistics. So, when we're doing all the national counting around all the women who have died, we're not counting trans women, and especially for the survivors that I support, in terms of when they have... they are a survivor of domestic abuse. So that's, kind of, one thing, but also they are, perhaps, a gay man.

And I think that, in the domestic violence sphere, sometimes being male can perhaps be seen as, kind of, like a... a bit of like a discrimination point – not because... I acknowledge that men have male privilege and in the wider spheres of society, they will always have that privilege – but especially being a gay man or, like, a bisexual man, they kind of hit the bottom of the male hierarchy.

I think, unfortunately, trans people in particular are...we're expected to be the experts, and it's kind of like we're expected to be the ones fighting our own corner, and ignorance around trans people and the issues that have arisen around trans women in refuges, for example, I think, for me, that's really important, it's really good to be touched on. So, yeah, I think it's...it's tough, it is really tough, and I don't want to...I never want to try and trivialise my clients and, kind of, play what I call 'oppression bingo', where it's, kind of, you're counting all the points and the reasons why somebody is, kind of, oppressed, but I do think also it's like: we do need to take account as people as a whole and realise that actually, like, there are multiple intersecting identities and sometimes kind of, you know, difficulties or problems or challenges that they faced that actually need to be addressed in an approach.

We're talking about domestic abuse – that's the starting point, that's the foundation but, actually, that's the bare minimum. We need to be talking more about the women of colour and the people of colour who are experiencing domestic abuse. We need to be talking about honour-based violence and hate crime as overlapping issues that can come into domestic abuse. We need to be talking about trans people and their limited access to housing and refuges and spaces.

Nicola: I think that...some both really powerful and fantastic perspectives when we're looking at intersectionality. And I think, Anisha, you mentioned earlier the term 'double discrimination', and I think it's quite clear it's not double discrimination, it's not triple, it's not even quadruple discrimination – it's multiple layers of discrimination. And, you know,

this is going on every day, all the time, and it's really under-recognised. And I think one thing that we might... I don't think we have quite touched on yet, another layer is older people and people that, you know...that's another issue as well as people with disabilities and another vulnerability that adds to these layers.

And I think it's really important that we do develop, you know, policies, as Hannana and Astrid have already said. But, you know, the services that we're delivering: they have to be inclusive, they have to be responsive to the needs of everybody. And, you know, thinking about the services that all of our services deliver, you know, it's amazing, and you need to have that specialist service. But then also, within, that we need to be aware of – and sensitive to – the fact that we are delivering a service to a specialist group of people, but also they are bringing multiple intersecting issues and discriminations with them. And we have to be inclusive and make sure that our services are also catering and supportive of that.

Sandra: Yeah, definitely. Thank you for talking about some of the key groups and particular characteristics of people who are repeatedly discriminated against and are, sort of, experiencing multiple challenges when trying to access support. Can you tell us a little bit about what barriers these particular groups are experiencing and how they, sort of, combat some of these challenges when trying to access support?

Nicola: Yeah, absolutely. So, I briefly mentioned those that have disabilities and older people, so those additional vulnerabilities – thinking about they're often relying on their abusers. So, the carers are sometimes abusers and they're relying on the carers for their day-to-day living. So, they're even more unable to leave the situations and get the help that they need.

And I think – just going back to the points that Hannana was making about women that are from black and minoritised communities – look at, you know, the current Afghanistan refugee crisis and some of the misunderstandings and the negative reactions to the refugee groups, and these responses are and will inevitably drive communities to become insular. And then what happens to the people in those communities that are affected by domestic abuse? They won't know where to go, they are going to be extremely vulnerable, they're going to be open to extremely high-risk

violence and abuse. And, you know, what can we do about that? How can we make sure that that doesn't happen or how can we respond to that better?

Hannana: I would say that one of the things that we need to really address is the need to have specialist services, and there are different needs out there, and different groups, you know, of victims of domestic abuse have different needs but also access different types of services. So you talked about male victims of domestic abuse – of course there are male victims of domestic abuse, but they need a specialist approach to their particular specific needs, which are not necessarily addressed with current voluntary or mainstream services.

So, I think the resources question and meeting multiple needs is also important but intersectionality, for me, is not just about...yes, of course, intersection is wide, you can have a whole range of different social characteristics that, kind of, overlap in order to create discrimination, but also it's the intersectionality of issues as well. So, you can have, you know, men and women who may be victims of abuse but also have an insecure immigration status. And, of course, you got to...you know, and they will have some shared problems that they experience because of their status around domestic abuse.

But I think, of course, we got to recognise disproportionality: there are groups who are... you know, women are more likely to be victims of domestic abuse. Black and minority women have higher rates of suicide; for example, Asian women have higher rates of suicide and domestic homicide, generally – linked with domestic abuse. They're more likely to experience issues around harmful practices than women or victims from other communities or characteristics. So, we just have to, kind of, you know, acknowledge that it is complex, and so the services and the way the state agencies respond to their needs have to reflect that complexity, and doesn't, you know... it's really not doing it sufficiently at the moment.

And, you know, for us, the barriers, you know, some of the key barriers that's forever ignored – it's not just the need for specialist services, but it's also reforming the immigration law so that migrant victims – migrant women – are able to access benefits, are able, you know... are not deported because their relationships are broken down, because that prevents a lot of women from leaving abusive relationships because they are frightened of being deported or being homeless or being destitute. But I think, on the

one hand, you've got the problem of racism that will act as a barrier, so they may experience racial discrimination or racial harassment or abuse, but also cultural sensitivity – it's another... kind of, another form of racism in a way because a lot of agencies or the state refuse to intervene to protect women from minority communities because they don't want to be seen as culturally insensitive or religiously insensitive.

So that is also another form of racism because it means it discriminates against minority women who may be facing domestic abuse. So those are, kind of, a number of barriers we have to deal with – not just within the community, which may be very tight-knit or very conservative and patriarchal, and prevents women from leaving abusive situations – but also from the state in terms of its laws, but also in terms of its practice, you know, around cultural sensitivity, racial discrimination, and so forth.

So I think that we need to be able to overcome all of this. And while the state says, you know, 'yes, we are trying to address these problems because we want to have equal access to everyone', the problem is, you know, that is also not even for everyone. And we have to be able to acknowledge that we have to address problems within the community, because often it's told: well, the community leaders can resolve these problems, you know, we don't have to worry about policing minority communities because, if something is justified in the name of religion, for example – and increasingly it can be a lot of religious groups would argue that this is, you know, acceptable within our religion and within our faith – then you've got to be able to say, 'well, no, because it discriminates against women or it discriminates or undermines human rights'. And for that reason, I think the state has to be able to not only be critical of, you know, abuse that may be justified in the name of religion or culture, but also provide the resources that are out there to help victims that meets their multiple and different needs.

Anisha: Definitely. I think there have been... there are so many points that you've all made that I really want to pick up and unpick each of them, but I'm really conscious that there's quite a few things that I want to cover. It's very clear that the issue is so complex, but it's such an excuse to turn around and say 'it's too complex, so we're just going to provide blanket services for everybody'. And I think it's also clear that not everybody has the same number of options when it comes to services.

What do you do in your individual services to combat these issues and these barriers that these communities face?

Nicola: As Astrid and Hannana have already said, you know, we are working with our networks and we work closely with specialists in the field to address, you know, the issues and the gaps, and what's missing. And, on a day-to-day basis, we're delivering specialist services but, again, as Hannana said, they're so needed but the funding is just completely, just...there's barely anything there, it's rarely recognised, there's not enough going on, there's so much more that needs to be done. But there are organisations like ours – all of ours that are here today – that, you know, we're doing everything that we can to make sure that we can at least can keep our services – our specialist services – going.

So, for example, at Stonewater, we do focus on and really gear our specialist domestic abuse services to those communities that are marginalised and minoritised. So, for example, we have a South Asian Women's Refuge, we have a specialist LGBTQ+ refuge, we've got services for women with multiple complex needs. We've got dispersed safe accommodation – so this is... a new project that we just started is delivering dispersed safe accommodation for those that are unable to access traditional refuges for a variety of reasons, most of which we've already talked about today.

But it's just us looking at another way of being able to provide safe accommodation and services to people that minoritised and marginalised and oppressed.

Anisha: That's what it's about, isn't it: making sure that everybody has an option, right? Everyone needs an option. What I'd like to ask you all is one tangible action that listeners listening to this episode can take away into, sort of, their daily lives or their thought processes, or anything. Hannana, if we could start with you.

Hannana: Well, what I would like people to do is obviously...well, actually, there's two things: one is that if they become aware or suspect that someone is going through domestic abuse – report it, help them. Obviously, don't put yourself at risk, but get advice about how to help them and, in an emergency, call the police. But then the other thing is that also, I would – more generally – would like people to support campaigning and activism, because you're not going to create change unless, you know, you

campaign. And the more help and support that we receive from the public generally would make a difference.

Anisha: Thank you. Astrid, any thoughts from you?

Astrid: I...yeah, basically, I was thinking about it and I think, for me, I want to say: educate yourself. I think everyone needs to educate themselves, not just on domestic abuse. I think they need to educate themselves on intersectionality, on diversity, on racism and transphobia, on ableism, ageism, sexism, patriarchy, feminism, all of the things. And then, once you've educated yourself, I want everyone to get angry because it is not good enough.

I think that, like, we have come so far and it's phenomenal to see the developments, but we are still lacking in so many areas, and I don't really fancy burning my bra if I'm quite honest, and I don't fancy running in front of, like, a horse and carriage and chaining myself to railings, but I feel like I'm getting to that point. We need to get involved, we need to get angry. And that applies to everybody: men, women, non-binary people, trans people, older people, young people, disabled people, you know, young people – everyone, because I think it's not good enough, you know, for anyone and everyone. And it's just, yeah, I want everyone to brush up on their knowledge and also then get involved and get angry.

Anisha: I really like...I really like that you said that because you said something earlier that made me think: you said as someone who identifies as trans, but it's not your job to educate everybody else. And, you know, sometimes you don't want to do that, and I remember when everything happened with BLM last year, as a woman of colour – and I'm sure that Sandra and Hannana can share this thought with me – that I didn't feel like it's my job to educate people about race...

Astrid: Oh yeah, yeah.

Anisha: ...and it's really nice that that's actually a shared thought.

Astrid: Oh...my favourite thing I heard from somebody once was someone said: 'I'm not your diversity queen'. I was like, 'I'm not your go-to, like, diversity support. It's, like,

Google is out there. I was, like, 'before you come and bother me, don't fill up my inbox with emails, go and do a Google first and then come back to me'. Like, obviously, I love to chat and I love to talk to people and be a resource, but also, if it's like... if you want to know what LGBT means – Google it, it's not art. That's not, you know, more deeper institutional issues: fair play, but don't just ask me... they're really like: 'What's the basic acronym'. It's like: have a look.

Nicola: I think also, just to add, in the spirit of, you know, the 16 Days and the accountability theme, I think my takeaway is to say to people is: also find out what's going on in your local area and get involved, and, you know, following on from what Astrid has just been saying: don't worry about what you don't know, that this is the start of the journey – this is the whole point. You'll be welcomed and, you know, it's your responsibility to go out there and find out what's going on. But don't be worried about it because, you know, we have a welcoming group and... any supporters, you know, it's on everybody, it's really important that everybody gets involved.

Anisha: Thank you so much for your time today and, for anybody listening, if you want to find out more information about this year's campaign, then we recommend looking at the 16 Days hashtag on Twitter, and we'll also include further information and links in our show notes for this episode. Thank you again for tuning into today's episode, and we'll speak to you all again soon.

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